About Highway Functional Classifications

Functional classification means the federal system of classifying groups of highways according to the character of service they are intended to provide and classifications made by the VDOT Commissioner based on the operational characteristics of a highway. Each highway is assigned a functional classification based on the highway's intended purpose for serving through traffic vs. providing access to property.

The functional classification system groups highways into three basic categories identified as (1) arterial, with two subclasses of "principal" and "minor", with the primary function to provide through movement of traffic; (2) collector, with the function of supplying a combination of through movement and access to property; and (4) local (streets), with the primary function of providing access to property.

Principal arterials are major highways of regional and statewide significance intended to serve through traffic where access to the highway is carefully controlled. Minor arterials interconnect with and augment the principal arterial system. Minor arterials distribute traffic to smaller geographic areas providing service between and within communities.

Collectors provide land access service and traffic circulation within residential, commercial, and industrial areas. The collector system distributes trips from the arterials through the area to the ultimate destination. Conversely, collectors also collect traffic from local streets in residential neighborhoods and channel it into the arterial system.

Local streets comprise all facilities that are not collectors or arterials. Local streets serve primarily to provide direct access to abutting land and to other streets.